

# The effectiveness of approved school youth rehabilitation

(Skuteczność resocjalizacji młodzieży zakładów poprawczych)

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**Abstract** - Introduction. The condition to perform well as an approved school teacher is to accept the past of a minor with all his or her faults. It is necessary to assume that a minor one deals with in an approved school is essentially a good person. It is an important message that a juvenile offender should acknowledge. A youth should be assured that in ordinary circumstances he or she can function as normally as any adolescent. However, one may wonder whether that kind of education-and-rehabilitation approach to juvenile delinquents establishes in them the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, which are crucial in adult life. The answer to that question was sought through the assessment of approved school youths' sense of coherence.

**Materials and methods.** In order to assess the sense of coherence among approved school youth, 54 juvenile delinquents were interviewed using the Sense of Coherence questionnaire (SOC-29). The results obtained were compared with those of the control group, which consisted of ordinary people.

**Results and conclusions.** It was observed that the sense of coherence among approved school youth is significantly lower than in the control group, which may be an important factor as far as their failures later on in life are concerned. What is more, the findings show that if the SOC-29 score is below 58, there is a high risk of the absence of therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) despite the teachers' efforts related to rehabilitation. care, for instance as elective courses at all kinds of universities.

**Key words** - the effectiveness of approved school youth rehabilitation.

**Streszczenie** – Wstęp. Warunkiem działalności resocjalizacyjnej jest m.in. zaakceptowanie nieletniego z całym jego „bagażem przeszłości”, „złogami” złych doświadczeń. Konieczne jest założenie, że małoletni, z którym się współpracuje w zakładzie poprawczym jest po prostu dobrym człowiekiem. Jest to ważne przesłanie, które powinno trafić do jego świadomości. Wychowankowi należy uzmysłowić, że w normalnych warunkach bytowania może funkcjonować jak każdy młody człowiek wchodzący w dorosłość. Może jednak zastanawiać, czy ta oferta wychowawczo-resocjalizacyjna skierowana do młodzieży zakładów poprawczych buduje u nich poczucie zrozumienia, zaradności i sensowności, tak potrzebne w dorosłym życiu. Odpowiedzi poszukiwano poprzez ocenę poziomu poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych.

**Materiał i metody.** Dla oceny poziomu poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych, badaniom poddano 54 młodych ludzi tych zakładów. Użyto Kwestionariusza Poczucia Koherencji

(SOC – 29), a uzyskane wyniki badań porównano ze zdrowymi osobnikami grupy kontrolnej.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Stwierdzono, że poziom poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych jest znacznie niższy w porównaniu do grupy kontrolnej co może być istotnym czynnikiem niepowodzeń tej młodzieży w „dorosłym życiu”. Wykazano ponadto, że gdy wartość punktowa testu SOC-29 jest niższa od 58 pkt., to pomimo prowadzonej starannej resocjalizacji istnieje u małoletnich znacznie statystycznie wysokie ryzyko braku uzyskania sukcesu terapeutycznego, w postaci braku wzrostu poczucia koherencji

**Słowa kluczowe** - poczucie koherencji, młodzież zakładu poprawczego.

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
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- D. Writing the article
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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the latest statistical data, juvenile crime in Poland is still progressing, which is unfortunate. This phenomenon is more and more visible in social dimension and it needs involvement from both state and communal institutions in order to be reduced. The greatest part in fighting crime and demoralization among minors should be played by families and schools [1-3]. Also efficient work of enforcement authorities and justice system are crucial. Frequently, a consequence of crimes committed by perverted youths is sending them to approved schools. The major task of such an institution is to initialize a process of introducing positive changes to the juvenile delinquents personalities. Nevertheless, one has to remember that this pertains mainly to minors who committed penal acts, posing a threat to property or well-being of others. In the process of rehabilitating such youths it is crucial to provide them with a good role model to follow. Another relevant action is to satisfy their needs in a sensible way; it pertains especially to those needs which were neglected in their everyday lives by those close to them, be it family or school. Lack of respect towards a child's or an adolescent's needs and desires gradually establishes in him or her a sense of inferiority, which often is later on expressed by aggression towards the part of the society he or she is alienated from [4,5].

Another condition to perform well as an approved school teacher is to accept the past of a minor with all his or her faults. It is necessary to assume that a minor one deals with in an approved school is essentially a good person. It is an important message that a juvenile offender should acknowledge. A youth should be assured that in ordinary circumstances he or she can function as normally as any adolescent [4,6]. However, one may wonder whether that kind of education-and-rehabilitation approach to juvenile delinquents establishes in them the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, which are crucial in adult life. The answer to that question was sought through the assessment of approved school youths' sense of coherence.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study group

In the period between November 2006 and January 2007, 54 adolescents from an approved school were subjected to the prospective study, their ages varying from 16 to 18. As requested by the management of the institution, its exact name and location is not to be disclosed. The studied juveniles filled in the form twice, the second time a year after the first.

### Research tool

The study was based on the results of the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (SOC – 29, Aaron Antonovsky, 1983), which is composed of 29 questions pertaining to different aspects of life. Each question has 7 responses to choose from [7].

The sense of coherence questionnaire constitutes three correlated parts: the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Obtaining high scores means strong sense of coherence.

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted to the Polish reality by the Department of Clinical Psychology of the Institute of Psychology and Neurology in Warsaw, the Department of Psychoprophylaxis of the Institute of Psychology, AMU in Poznań and the Department of Occupational Psychology of the Occupational Medicine Institute in Łódź.

### Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis of the results obtained was carried out using SAS software for IBM PC rel. 6.03. Mean, standard deviation, minimal value and maximal value were calculated for each group.

In order to study the differences between mean values, the t-Student test was used. The significance level for all the decisions was  $\alpha=0,05$ .

Discriminative and critical threshold values were calculated and a percentile method of minimalizing a "social loss" was determined according to the formula (8):

$$P_{\alpha} = \frac{1}{2}(\bar{x}_2 + \bar{x}_1) - \frac{s^2}{\bar{x}_2 - \bar{x}_1} \ln \frac{WP_2}{P_1},$$

where:

$P_{\alpha}$  - threshold level

$\bar{x}_1$  i  $\bar{x}_2$  - means in the compared groups

S – standard deviation

W – weight of the data

$P_1$  and  $P_2$  – prevalence of people in each group.

## III. RESULTS

In the studied group of minors, the mean sense of coherence level was 98,1+32,73. Table 1 presents the results of Aaron Antonovsky's SOC-29 test obtained in the two interviews with each of juvenile offenders (the first and the second study were separated by one-year-period).

Table 1. Mean values of sense of coherence in the studied group

Value (points)	Study I	Study II
N	54	54
Mean	90,08*	106,11**
Minimal	35	42
maximal	151	158
± SD	± 29,86	± 34,08

### to \*\*\* -  $p < 0,05$

The statistically significant increase in the studied youths' sense of coherence level is very much apparent ( $p < 0,05$ ). Moreover, Figure 1 shows the distribution of SOC-29 scores among the studied minors in the two approaches.

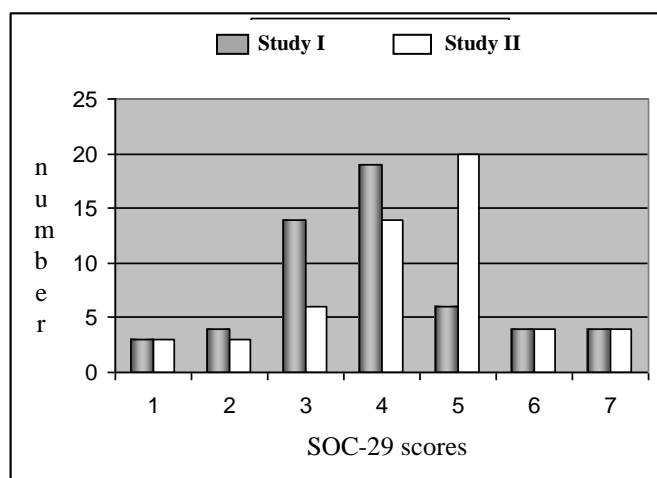


Figure 1. The distribution of SOC-29 scores among the studied minors

Grades:

1: 20-40 points, 2: 40-60 points, 3: 60-80 points, 4: 80-100 points, 5: 100-120 points, 6: 120-140 points, 7: 140-160 points

The data presented in figure 1 imply that the distribution of scores changed after a year. What is important is that the number of youths with scores between 100 and 120 increased, which accounted for the significant decrease in the number of youths with scores between 60 and 80. What is more, there were virtually no changes in the lowest-scoring group (20 to 40 points) as well as the highest-scoring group (120 – 160

points).

The assessment of the time trend of the SOC-29 score changes among the studied youth is presented in figure 2.

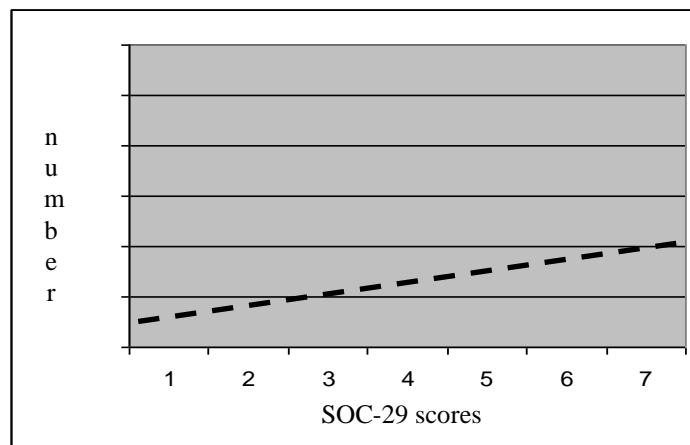


Figure 2. Time trend of changes in the approved school youths' sense of coherence level

Grades:

1: 20-40 points, 2: 40-60 points, 3: 60-80 points, 4: 80-100 points, 5: 100-120 points, 6: 120-140 points, 7: 140-160 points

Figure 2 indicates that in the case of the studied juvenile offenders, the time trend of the sense of coherence rises in a statistically significant way ( $p < 0,05$ , Scheffé's method).

In the following part of the research the authors attempted to determine the specific score value of the SOC-29 test below which the efforts put into proper rehabilitation do not result in statistically significant increase in the coherence level. The findings of this analysis are shown in table 2.

Table 2. The threshold value of the SOC-29 test which signifies no statistically significant

Parameter	Threshold value	Mean error (%)
The score of the SOC-29 test	58	10,9

The statistical analysis suggests that there is a threshold value of the SOC-29 test below which minors cope with statistically significant risk of achieving no therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) even if they receive help in terms of rehabilitation. That value is 58 points.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The concept of coherence stems from Aron Antonovsky's consideration of Jews who survived concentration camps. Some of the people who were imprisoned in camps have never regained the will to live; moreover, they got ill or died more frequently than their peers. Others managed to maintain optimistic approach, vitality and cheerfulness in spite of having been through similar experiences. In search of justification for different attitudes of people who experienced the same traumatic events, Antonovsky worked out his concept of salutogenesis, for which the sense of coherence idea is central [9].

Antonovsky defines sense of coherence as global and complex orientation of a human being (generalized, emotional and cognitive way of perceiving the world), which expresses a degree of general approach consisting of three basic components:

- comprehensibility connected with cognitive possibilities in the situation of a person;
- manageability which makes one see a way out of one's situation thanks to the resources one has;
- meaningfulness which determines that it is worth to get involved in the aspects of one's life. The sense of meaningfulness is responsible for what one believes is the meaning of one's life.

Therefore, the sense of coherence may constitute a determinant of those young people's activity in life and at work, especially as they approach adult life in peculiar circumstances provided by approved schools. The results of the research indicate that minors subjected to rehabilitation and approved school education have a low sense of coherence. Their level of the sense of coherence is similar to that of women suffering from depressive syndrome (with their mean score of the SOC-29 test being 99 points) or patients with neurotic disorders (their mean score of the SOC-29 test being 102-109 points). Unfortunately, the sense of coherence as measured for the juvenile offenders is far from mean value for healthy men in our population (their average score of SOC-29 being 136 points) [10, 11]. That is certainly thought-provoking.

However, the analysis of the sense of coherence changes overtime is a bit more optimistic. Here one can observe a statistically significant and therefore apparent increase (the mean value rising from 90,08 to 106,11 with a year) in the cases of minors subjected to rehabilitation in an approved school. However, that increase is not short-interval one. Their education- and rehabilitation opportunities allow them to increase their sense of coherence level, which is highlighted by the increasing time trend of the SOC-29 test scores. Nevertheless, it turns out that the rehabilitation offered by approved schools does not result in uniform change of the sense of coherence. Predominantly, it brings about an increase in the number of

minors scoring in the range 100 to 120 points, which is reflected in the decrease in number of the group with scores between 60 and 80 points. Alarming enough, there are virtually no changes in the number of the youths in the lowest score range (20 to 40 points). The highest range (120 to 160 points) also remained unchanged in terms of numbers. Many authors emphasize that successful rehabilitation depends on many factors. Our research indicates that the sense of coherence has an impact on the psychological development of an adolescent. The statistical analysis indicated that when score of the SOC-29 test is lower than 58 points, there is a high risk of the absence of therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) despite the teachers' efforts related to rehabilitation. It appears, then, that in this particular group of approved school youth the role of the staff in encouraging proper rehabilitation is increasingly important, as they have an impact on juvenile offenders' personality development. It is our opinion that the youths whose sense of coherence is below 58 points should be included in a specifically worked out rehabilitation programme which would allow them to reach a level of private and professional activity that is similar to that of their peers brought up in non-pathological environment.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

1. The sense of coherence level among approved schools youth is significantly lower than in other juvenile groups, which may to a large extent account for their failures in their adult lives.
2. There is a SOC-29 score (58 points to be precise) below which there is a high risk of the absence of therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) despite the teachers' efforts related to rehabilitation.

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